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Part 1: News Analysis

Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov and the U.S. Department of State used the run-up to the president's appearance before the UN General Assembly in New York on September 26, with meetings with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and private individuals on the margins, to make policy statements clarifying their respective bilateral agendas.

Perhaps mindful of international criticism of his country's human rights practices, President Berdimukhamedov spoke out this week against child labor – which is already outlawed in Turkmenistan – and, in televised remarks to an international IT conference in Ashgabat, in favor of bringing the Internet “to every home.” Turkmenistan has among the lowest per capita Internet connectivity rates in the world and in 2005 was labelled one of fifteen “Enemies of the Internet” by Reporters sans frontières for its strict surveillance, filtering and blocking of websites deemed politically sensitive. (In a decision likely to please his domestic audience, the president also announced this week that military conscripts tasked with agricultural work would, as of next year's season, be allowed to tend their own land.)

In anticipation of the Turkmen president's arrival in the U.S., Evan A. Feigenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, delivered a comprehensive policy speech, “Turning the Page: U.S.-Turkmenistan Relations,” at the Washington-based think-tank the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on September 17. Feigenbaum cited 18 delegations sent by the U.S. to Turkmenistan in the last 9 months – 15 from the executive branch and 3 from the legislative branch of government – indicating an unprecedentedly intensive engagement with Turkmenistan on a variety of issues from energy to human rights. The delegations met with 13 Turkmen government ministries and agencies in 3 provinces. Feigenbaum explained how many of the issues critical to U.S. foreign policy everywhere can be found in the microcosm of Central Asia, and specifically in Turkmenistan. These include: increasing assertiveness by Russia in its own region and the world; the emerging influence of Iran and China; trans-national terrorism and narcotics-smuggling; energy security; debate about Islam; and democracy promotion among governments and elites who, as Feigenbaum noted, “do not share our enthusiasm” for these values.

Feigenbaum stressed that the U.S. engaged with Turkmenistan for its own sake, and did not subscribe to theories that its allegiance was “lost” or “won” by this or that great power striving for influence. The Assistant Secretary also dismissed caricatures of Turkmenistan as a “Stalinist theme park,” noting that the U.S. has been able to run a variety of productive programs for health, education, and economic welfare for the Turkmen people. Feigenbaum lauded the increasing cooperation from the government of Turkmenistan in achieving regional stability (Afghanistan) and in the energy sphere. He noted that the lack of a convertible currency and transparent banking procedures could benefit from U.S. assistance in order to increase investment opportunities. He said the U.S. was “intrigued” by a government Democracy and Human Rights Commission set up to discuss these issues and cited the release of 11 political prisoners in August 2007 as significant.

This week Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty marked the one-year anniversary of the death in custody of its Turkmen Service stringer and the sister of a political opposition member, Ogulsapar Muradova. In a September 14 article, RFE/RL noted that no independent investigation of her case has been conducted. An official of Reporters sans frontières commented in the article that the failure to bring justice in this case and

other methods of censorship and harassment of independent media suggest that the government of Turkmenistan does not want a free press.

Part 2: News Digest

Summary: In the run-up to President Berdymukhamedov's trip to the U.S. to attend the UN General Assembly, the State Department promoted awareness of its engagement with Turkmenistan on trade, energy and security and expressed satisfaction with some progress on human rights. The Turkmen president reiterated his support for the existing ban on child labor and vowed increased Internet access, but NGOs noted the failure to ensure press freedom.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. U.S. Policy Address about U.S-Turkmen Relations on Eve of Berdymukhamedov Trip to U.S.

Original title: "Turning the Page" in U.S-Turkmenistan Relations.

Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, address by Evan A. Feigenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. State Department/09/17/07. For more information contact info@CarnegieEndowment.org

Synopsis: In perhaps the most comprehensive U.S. government policy statement on Turkmenistan to date, Evan A. Feigenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, explained to an audience at the prestigious Washington think-tank, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, why the U.S. is "turning the page" in U.S.-Turkmenistan relations and moving to extensive engagement on trade, business, and security, even as officials continue to find ways to raise human rights and democracy concerns. The U.S. has sent 15 executive branch delegations in the last 9 months and 3 legislative branch delegations at the senior and working levels.

Feigenbaum dismissed the concept vaunted in the media that Russia or the U.S. has 'won' or 'lost' Turkmenistan with twists and turns of every oil deal "The reason it's ridiculous is that Turkmenistan is not 'ours'—or anyone else's—to 'win' or 'lose.'"

Feigenbaum also dismissed what he deemed "caricatures" of Turkmenistan as portraying it as "Stalinist," citing the numerous aid and educational programs the U.S. is able to run in Turkmenistan, and the increase in cooperation on border protection, combating drug smuggling and weapons of mass destruction, and coordinating on regional stability, like Turkmenistan's southern neighbor Afghanistan, and on domestic issues, like public health and education. He said he was "intrigued" by the government's formation of the Democracy and Human Rights Commission and looked forward to sending U.S. delegations to engage on these topics, and that he was "encouraged" by President Berdymukhamedov's "strong interest in the Internet."

Feigenbaum said that while Turkmenistan had among the largest energy reserves in the world, developing them would be "costly" because they are "technically challenging." Still, the potential wealth could be "immensely important" for the people of Turkmenistan, and cited the experiences of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan as examples of what "increased energy exports and smart investment policies can mean for a country's prosperity."

b. American NGOs Deliver Antibiotics to Turkmenistan

Original title: Project HOPE and FH/US Delivers more than \$1 million in Antibiotics to Turkmenistan's Hospitals. Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: U.S. Embassy—Ashgabat Press Release/09/18/07

Full version: <http://turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/pr20070918.html>

Excerpt: The non-profit voluntary organizations Project HOPE and Food for the Hungry/U.S. have worked together to donate one million dollars in valuable antibiotics that are not produced in Turkmenistan and will be distributed through hospitals around the country and in rural areas. The delivery of this broad spectrum antibiotic will support treatment of various acute infections, such as respiratory tract, urinary tract, and intra-abdominal infections.

Since 2000, Project HOPE, with funding from the United States Government through the U.S. Agency for International Development, has provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan in implementing the DOTS Strategy (Directly Observed Therapy-Short Course) for tuberculosis (TB) treatment. With its partners, which are both state institutions and non-governmental organizations, Project HOPE develops and enhances elements of the National TB Program including training, monitoring and quality assessment, drug management, social mobilization, and laboratory materials. Since the beginning of its work in Turkmenistan, Project HOPE assisted in equipping laboratories with binocular microscopes and reagents. During the course of its work in Turkmenistan, anti TB drugs have also been supplied to the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan' tuberculosis hospitals in Ashgabat, Turkmenbashi, Mary, and Balkanabat.

[Passages omitted on history and background of Project HOPE and its director].

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Turkmen President Says He Will Bring Internet “to Every Home”

Original title: *Turkmen President Wants to Bring Internet “to Every Home”.*

Source: *BBC Monitoring Central Asia/TV Altyn Assyr/09/14/07*

Turkmen President Berdymukhamedov, in a message to an international IT forum currently under way in Ashgabat, has said he wants the Internet and other telecommunication services to be available for every Turkmen citizen, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing Turkmenistan's TV Altyn Assyr on September 13.

"Many of conveniences offered by the modern technology are already available for our public, who can now access the world-wide database via the Internet. My desire is that both the Internet and all other advanced communication technologies could be available for every citizen of Turkmenistan," he said in the message read out on Altyn Assyr TV.

Inviting foreign IT companies to partner with Turkmenistan, Berdymukhamedov said that "Turkmenistan is always open for all countries which are ready for a positive partnership in all spheres, including the sphere of telecommunication and information technology." Representatives of some 50 firms and companies are taking part in the forum and exhibition of IT technologies in Ashgabat, the report said.

b. Turkmen Schoolchildren Banned from Cotton Harvest

Original title: *Turkmen Schoolchildren Banned from Cotton Harvest. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *ITAR/TASS/09/10/07*

Full version: <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=11858152&PageNum=0>

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has banned schoolchildren from taking part in the cotton harvest, ITAR-TASS reported, citing Turkmen state media. Turkmen law as well as international treaties prohibit the use of child labor, the president explained in a speech to kick off the harvest season.

The former President Saparmurat Niyazov had also banned child labor, but in fact local government continued to use children in the harvest. President Berdymukhamedov said that starting in 2008, army conscripts and police would be performing agricultural labor on their own farms.

c. Turkmen Human Rights Commission Holds First Meeting

Original title: *Inter-Department Commission on Human Rights Holds First Meeting in Ashgabat. Translation and synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *turkmenistan.ru/09/18/07*

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=11042&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: The Inter-ministerial Commission on the Implementation of Turkmenistan's International Commitments on Human Rights held its first session at the President's National Institute on Democracy and Human Rights in Ashgabat, turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the State News Agency (TDH). The agenda included a discussion of the Commission's mandate and program of activities as well as preparation of national reports on the implementation of UN human rights conventions. The new body is expected to monitor the compliance of domestic law with international human rights standards.

The Commission approved a national human rights program and a joint project of the UNHCR, European Commission, and UNDP on building capacity for Turkmenistan to prepare national reports.

d. One Year Later, Still No Full Investigation into Turkmen Journalist's Death

Original title: Turkmenistan: Media Repression Continues One Year After Journalist's Death Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty/09/14/07. . Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/09/6f566206-fb7a-4c77-88c1-43e844412f68.html>

Excerpt: On June 18, 2006, the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation on Human Rights (THF) released a report on a "new wave of arrests of civil activists." It said Turkmen security forces had arrested human-rights activists Annagurban Amangylyjov, Yelena Ovezova, Sapardurdy Hajiyev, and RFE/RL correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova. All of them were held for allegedly possessing banned weapons.

The 58-year-old Muradova -- a former member of the THF -- had been reporting on deteriorating social conditions in Turkmenistan. At that time of her arrest, she had worked for RFE/RL for only three months. After her arrest, it was reported that Turkmen security agencies had earlier cut her telephone line and put her house under constant surveillance.

According to the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation, she also was followed by security-service agents and placed on video surveillance for 20 days before her arrest. Despite such pressures, Muradova continued performing her job as a journalist.

September 14, 2006, became a black day on the calendar for Muradova's family, which includes three children and grandchildren. Turkmen Security officials informed the family that Muradova had died and claimed her death was from natural causes. However, people who saw her body say it showed signs of Muradova having been severely beaten.

One year later, there has been no thorough investigation into the circumstances that led to Muradova's sentencing in a closed trial and her death in custody in prison. Her death is a tragic example of the overall human-rights condition in Turkmenistan.

[Passages omitted on death of former President Saparmurat Niyazov and continuation of state censorship.]

"The actions by the government taken against journalists who candidly express their views once again shows that there is no way for freedom of expression in Turkmenistan," said Hanamov Nurmuhammet, the leader of the Republican Party in exile. "Once again, it shows that authorities want to destroy independent journalists. It emphasizes the fact that free media and free expression is banned in the country."

In an interview with RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, Jean-Francois Julliard, a news editor at Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said, "Countries like Turkmenistan don't want a free press, don't want the journalists to be able to speak freely and to criticize freely their governments."

He added: "This is the reason why in a lot of countries -- including Central Asian countries and Turkmenistan -- the authorities try to do their best to control the press, to control the independent media, and to try to shut down the critical voices."

[Passages omitted on small sign of liberalization, the August 9 pardoning of 11 prisoners and promised release of 9,000 prisoners next month.]

[Passages omitted on continued RSF monitoring of press freedom in Turkmenistan, and memorial for Muradova in France.]

e. Some Experts Link Cotton Cultivation to Epidemic

Excerpt prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Eurasianet.org/09/18/07

Full version: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091807.shtml>

Excerpt: A mysterious illness, presenting with flu-like symptoms, is sweeping across two of Turkmenistan's most populous provinces, Ashgabat and Dashoguz, Eurasianet.org reported. Some health care professionals

quietly link the outbreak to cotton cultivation, which requires the heavy use of defoliants, pesticides and other toxic agents.

Ashgabat residents report that the disease -- the symptoms of which are headaches, a stuffed-up nose, a hacking cough and runny eyes -- struck suddenly around the start of September. "I noticed that all of a sudden all our family members fell ill almost at the same time," said one resident of Turkmen capital.

[Passage omitted on persistence of symptoms and patients' complaints, and secretive Turkmen health policy.]

But a health-care official in Ashgabat, speaking on condition of anonymity, admitted that the epidemic is not caused by the spread of germs, but is instead an allergic reaction. And many experts are convinced that chemicals used in cotton cultivation are the culprits.

"We have experienced this problem for a few years already. In the season of cotton ripening and harvesting, the rate of [upper respiratory] disorders ... sharply increases," the health-care official said. "I presume the authorities will never acknowledge that this is a reaction to the chemicals used in cotton harvesting, as this is tantamount to acknowledging that the health and life of Turkmen citizens is of no value at all. Don't forget that our president [Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov] is a medic, so everything has to be 'ok' in this area."

[Passages omitted on decree banning child labor in cotton industry, and environmental hazard of cotton industry].

The government's refusal to admit mistakes, combined with inattention to the proper use of hazardous agents, has left doctors in an awkward position. "Small children are especially vulnerable, and this is most terrible," said one Ashgabat pediatrician. "Though we are instructed to tell nobody that this is an allergic condition, I just can't keep parents in the dark about the real state of affairs in these cases, and merely prescribe absolutely useless antibiotics. Of course, I recommend taking antihistamines. We, doctors, are facing a dual challenge here: to help our patients, and to [keep] our job."

[Passage omitted on public loss of trust in health care system.]

3. Economic News

a. British Energy Minister Visits Turkmenistan

Original title: Turkmenistan and Great Britain Discussion Fuel and Energy Partnership. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/09/20/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=ru&elem_id=11060&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: President Berdimukhamedov received Malcolm Wicks, a member of the British parliament and British Minister of Energy on September 19, turkmenistan.ru reported. The two sides discussed the potential for partnership in the fuel and energy sector, including in exploration of new fields, and transport of Turkish fuel to world markets. The British minister also met with the Turkmen Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources, the Ministry of Energy and Industry, Turkmengas, the State Agency for the Management and Use of Hydrocarbons, the Foreign Ministry, and the Cabinet of Ministers.

b. Turkmen Leader Hails Cooperation With Japan

Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: BBC Monitoring--Central Asia/09/20/07/TV Altyn Asyr/09/19/07

Synopsis: President Berdimukhamedov received Minoru Murofushi, co-chairman of the Turkmen-Japanese Economic Cooperation Commission, an honorary advisor of the Itochu Corporation, BBC Monitoring reported, citing TV Altyn Asyr. Forty representatives of well-known Japanese companies have arrived in Turkmenistan to take part in the 7th session of the Turkmen-Japanese commission. The president cited the need to develop broad cooperation with Japan, and a number of construction projects involving Japanese companies were cited.

c. Turkmenistan Gas Exports to Iran Expected to Rise in 2008

Original title: *Turkmen Schoolchildren Banned from Cotton Harvest. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: mehrnews.com/09/18/07

Full version: <http://www.mehrnews.ir/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=554657>

Synopsis: Iran's gas imports from Turkmenistan are expected to hit 15 bcm in 2008, with a 6 bcm increase next year, mehrnews.com reported, citing the National Iranian Gas Export Company. The anticipated increase in imports has grown out of recent summit talks with Iran.

Turkmenistan has been exporting gas to Iran since 1998, via the Korpezh-Kurt Kui pipeline, which is its first pipeline not to cross Russian territory.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been prepared by OSI's Turkmenistan Project.

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